

Congresswoman Melissa L. Bean  
Testimony to House Committee on Rules  
Lobbying Reform Hearing  
March 30, 2006

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I want to thank you Mr. Chairman and the members of this Committee for holding this hearing today.

My constituents and Americans across the nation have been hearing about the need for lobbying reform. Unfortunately, they are suspicious of our commitment to enacting real reforms—a by-product of past excesses, still-unfolding scandals, a complacent acceptance of the status quo and our slow response to act.

I am encouraged that this Committee has invited us here today to discuss reform proposals and I hope the House can come together across partisan lines to shed more daylight on how we conduct business and take action to prevent abuses of the legislative process in the future.

I believe the most important responsibility we have as Representatives is to keep our constituents informed of how and why we make the decisions we do in Washington. It is my sincere wish that our chamber institute real changes that will provide the transparency demanded by our constituents and should be expected of the United States Congress.

First, I want to speak to the idea of earmark reform. I believe Members should continue to have the ability to request federal funds through priority projects for worthy initiatives in their districts. We each understand the unique needs, challenges, and opportunities of our districts better than other members; and we should be able to present the case for our requests on their merits.

However, the current earmarking process as designed circumvents the public by including member requests in conference reports. Every year, questionable projects are found in these reports—sometimes inserted in the dead of night—which call into question the dedication of this body to spending tax dollars wisely.

For this reason, I am supporting Congressman Flake's proposal to move member projects out of report language and into legislative texts debated on the floor. Mr. Chairman, I would hope we all can agree that projects worth funding are worth debating.

Mr. Chairman, this is one step necessary toward greater transparency in government. But it is also my belief that we aren't doing enough to make it easier for the American people to follow the votes we cast. The Library of Congress' THOMAS web site is a valuable tool for civic participation. But constituents sometimes find it difficult to find a complete record of their Representative's votes.

We should all provide our constituents an easily accessible resource for tracking our votes. I plan on introducing a resolution which would require the House Clerk to maintain complete voting records organized by member linked to each of our official websites so that our constituents can easily find out how we've voted on each roll call. With the click of a button, anyone with access to the internet would be able to view a comprehensive list of every vote taken during a Congress and see a description of each vote, and if possible, an estimated cost of the legislation when appropriate.

Mr. Chairman, more information, and more transparency for the American people, can only serve to strengthen American democracy, improve the accountability of this body, and reduce the potential for abuses in the future.

Thank you again for this opportunity to address the Committee.